

SEXUAL AND GENDER BASED VIOLENCE

"Today and every day, women and girls all over the world will face violence simply because they are female. This gender-based violence not only harms the victims and their families, it shreds the fabric that weaves us together as human beings." --Secretary Hillary Rodham Clinton, November 2009

The State Department is committed to ending the global pandemic of violence against women and girls. This violence cuts across ethnicity, race, class, religion, education level, and international borders. It has the potential to affect women and girls at every point in their lives, from sex-selective infanticide, to child marriage, trafficking, domestic violence, female genital mutilation/cutting, "honor" killings, the neglect and ostracism of widows, sexual violence, rape as a weapon of war, and much more. Additionally, women and girls are disproportionately affected by HIV/AIDS, with rape and relationship violence contributing to the growing infection rate, especially among adolescents.

One in three women worldwide will experience gender-based violence (GBV) in their lifetime, and in some countries, 70 percent of female populations are affected. According to UN Women, violence against women and girls causes more death and disability for women and girls between the ages of 16 and 44 than do cancer, traffic accidents, and malaria combined. While many countries have achieved forward-looking laws supporting women's rights, there is often a lack of implementation and enforcement.

The United States takes a multi-pronged approach to addressing gender-based violence, including both short and long term goals to ensure appropriate care for survivors while also strengthening deterrents against gender-based violence. Our priorities include the protection of women and girls (physical and legal), the prevention of violence against women and girls, and the prosecution of perpetrators in order to address impunity. Each year, the Secretary's Office of Global Women's Issues raises awareness and highlights the issue by commemorating the International Day for the Elimination of Violence Against Women (IDEVAW) on November 25th and the accompanying "16 Days of Activism."

Violence Against Women and Girls

As part of a \$5 million small grants initiative, S/GWI is currently providing over \$1.2 million in small grants to grassroots NGOs addressing gender-based violence globally. Additionally, through the Secretary's International Fund for Women and Girls, in partnership with the Avon Foundation, S/GWI awarded 10 grants totaling \$500,000 to grassroots non-governmental organizations in eight countries working to address GBV. S/GWI's single largest program of \$1.5 million comes out of the Iraqi Women's Development Initiative (IWDI). The specific program is aimed at reducing violence against Iraqi women and girls. Investments to combat violence against women and girls include:

- **Prevention and Response:** Expanding local NGO services to effectively address the needs of women and girls in conflict areas, through physical and psychological treatment, legal counsel, and protection measures, including access to safe houses.
- **Community Engagement:** Supporting civil society efforts to engage with men and boys to address and prevent violence against women and girls. It is important to change underlying social attitudes that perpetuate violence through dialogues with religious leaders, politicians, military officials, and students.
- **Capacity Building:** Strengthening grassroots NGOs to advance local judicial and law enforcement education and training, coordination of development efforts, and public advocacy aimed at preventing violence against women and girls.



As we look ahead toward a comprehensive international campaign to end violence against women and girls, we must ensure that all of the following are a part of our strategies:

- (1) First and foremost, we must define violence not only as a “women’s” issue but as one of **international human rights and national security**. This means that we need everyone’s involvement. People at all levels of society, in every vocation, and at every age – girls, boys, women, and men – all have a role to play.
- (2) Involvement by **international religious leaders of all faiths** is critical.
- (3) **Men and boys** can and must be a part of the effort to end violence against women and girls.
- (4) Continuing to work towards girls and women’s **economic empowerment** is essential. Beyond the development gains that accrue to countries in which women are active economic participants, women and girls who control their own resources may feel more empowered to escape situations of violence.
- (5) In areas of conflict, the best outcome is a rapid end to strife. We must recognize the collateral damage done to civilian girls and women in regions of protracted conflict, and **improve protection for women and girls**, prevention of further atrocities, and we must ensure the prosecution of perpetrators, be they soldiers or top commanders.
- (6) We must recognize that violence against women and girls flourishes where impunity is the norm. Regions in conflict are particularly vulnerable to judicial breakdown, but impunity can also reign long after conflicts are resolved. Good laws don’t ensure that women and girls will be protected. We must work with governments around the world to focus on the implementation of laws and on judicial training in order to ensure an end to impunity.
- (7) Finally, we need to understand that violence against women and girls is a policy imperative that deserves to be our highest priority. We need to recognize that this problem of violence is, at its root, a manifestation of the low status of women and girls around the world. Ending the violence requires elevating their status and freeing their potential to be agents of change in their community. Accomplishing this goal requires drawing upon the other strategies outlined above, but, especially, involves a deep commitment to quality education for both sexes.

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